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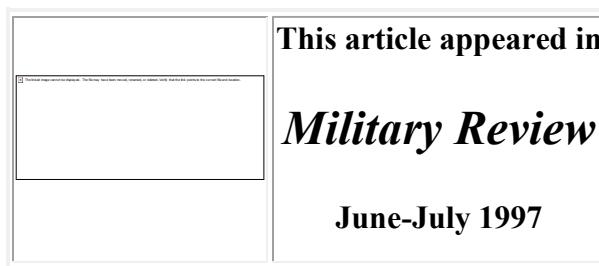
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A FACE OF FUTURE BATTLE: CHECHEN FIGHTER SHAMIL BASAYEV

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Figure 1 - Shamil Basayev Photo credits to Mr. Ed Opp



Introduction

As the 20th Century draws to a close, military theorists and planners, in and out of uniform, are considering the implications that changes in the global security environment have for future conflict and war. The certainties of the Cold War have been replaced by a number of

indeterminate, indistinct threats. As Desert Storm proved, the US military remains prepared to defeat large conventional forces, but is it ready to tackle those obscure dangers looming on the horizon? Consider the recent comments of the Marine Corps Commandant: "future war is most likely not the son of Desert Storm; rather it will be the stepchild of Somalia and Chechnya".¹ In Somalia, despite overwhelming superiority in firepower and technology, a group of lightly-armed "rebels" effectively forced the US military out of the country by inflicting casualties on an elite unit.

Our former nemesis and Cold War foe has also painfully wrestled with the changing nature of war. For the past two years, the Russian military has been unsuccessfully engaged in crushing the relatively small, rebel forces, fighting for the independence of Chechnya. The Russian failure is due to a number of factors, not least of which has been the courageous leadership of a handful of Chechen leaders. As the US discovered in Somalia, so the Russians have learned that conventional military prowess is no match against rebel forces, led by skilled and committed leaders. This study will examine how one of the Chechen rebel leaders, Shamil Basayev, was able to bring the goliath of Russian armed forces to its knees.

Shamil Basayev

Chechnya these days is a place where little boys barely old enough to talk tell strangers their name is Shamil Basayev--a guerrilla commander whom Moscow has considered a leading international terrorist since he led a mass hostage-taking in June 1995.²

Though highly improbable, one wonders if Shamil Basayev ever saw the movie *Braveheart*. The movie portrays William Wallace, and his attempt to lead his undermanned and poorly equipped Scottish army, in their fight for independence against the more powerful England. During the past two years, Shamil Basayev and a few thousand Chechen combatants have largely defeated the much larger and better equipped Russian military. Though final determination of Chechnya's political status has been postponed for five years, for all practical purposes the Chechens have (for the time being, at least) won their independence. This article will examine Shamil Basayev and the role he played in gaining Chechen freedom.

The Chechens are a warrior people, one of a number of fiercely independent tribes within the mountainous regions of the Caucasus. Living along an invasion route between Europe and Asia, a deep and enduring warrior tradition evolved among these peoples. The Chechens gained the reputation of doggedly resisting any foreign domination. Whether it was the Mongols in the 13th, the Turks in the 16th, or the Russians in the 19th and 20th Centuries, the Chechens have never accepted foreign rule. Though the Russians managed in the 19th Century, after more than thirty years of fighting, to seize most of the Chechen territory, they were never able to fully incorporate the Chechen people into the Russian empire.³

The Bolsheviks, and later the Soviet Communist government did not fare much better. Until the Second World War, the Soviets were able to effectively repress continued Chechen claims for independence. During the war, however, a portion of the Chechen population sided with Nazi forces in an attempt to break free from their Slavic-Communist masters. In retribution for this "betrayal", Stalin brutally deported the entire Chechen population to Kazakhstan, killing

approximately a quarter of the population in the process.⁴ The Chechens were allowed to return during the late 1950's, and lived in relative peace until the Soviet Union began to disintegrate.

In mid-1991, sensing weakness and confusion within the Kremlin, nationalist leaders within the Chechen republic began to press demands for independence. A new local government, led by former Soviet Air Force General, Dzhokhar Dudyayev, declared Chechen independence in November 1991. Other, more immediate problems prevented the central authorities from taking vigorous action against these Chechen claims. The situation continued to deteriorate, with Chechnya gaining both a self-declared independence and the reputation as a "gangster state". Using a variety of means, the Chechens also acquired a large portion of the former Soviet military equipment which had been deployed on their territory. Finally, after a number of unsuccessful, clandestine attempts to unseat the popular Dudyayev, the Russian government, in December 1994, deployed both regular and internal forces to crush Chechnya's self-proclaimed independence.

Two years later (Dec 96), after tens of thousands of casualties, with much of Chechnya in ruins and the Russian security establishment badly shaken, a tentative cease-fire has taken hold. Most of the Russian forces have now pulled out of Chechnya. How did this tiny ethnic people, with a population of less than a million, defeat a Russian military establishment, that while damaged, still possessed one of the world's most formidable arsenals and a personnel strength far greater than the entire Chechen population?⁵ There are a number of factors, not least of which has been the savage courage of committed Chechen fighters like Shamil Basayev.⁶

Shamil the Man

Like most controversial figures, there are a number of widely different assessments of this Chechen leader. For many Russians, he embodies the ruthless, criminal characteristics of a terrorist. His name became well known during the bloody events in June 1995, when Basayev and a handful of Chechen combatants, held some 1,500 Russian civilians hostage within the Budennovsk city hospital. Among his countrymen, however, Basayev is a great hero; a composite mix of Robin Hood, George Washington and his 19th Century namesake, Shamil.⁷ On more than one occasion, when Russian forces were on the threshold of destroying the remnants of Chechen resistance, Basayev managed to strengthen Chechen resolve and strike the Russians where it hurt.

Other than his birthplace, there is nothing in Shamil Basayev's early biography which would indicate his future martial prowess. He was born in 1965 in the small Chechen village of Vedeno. This village is adjacent to the fortress where a century earlier the great Chechen leader Shamil surrendered to Russian forces. For a young Chechen, the exploits of this distant ancestor must have been a source of pride and inspiration. Like many of the other ethnic groups which inhabit the Caucasus, the Chechens value highly the attributes of personal courage, clan loyalty, and expertise in warfare and weaponry. There could be no better role model for a young Chechen than the brave Shamil.⁸

Basayev spent his childhood in Vedeno, completing secondary education there in 1982. Upon graduation, he spent two years in the Soviet military. Little is known of his Soviet military

record, other than he served as a "fireman".⁹ He intended to become a policeman but could not get into law school and so worked in agriculture.¹⁰ By the time he finished school (1990), the first cracks were beginning to appear within the Soviet Union. The Berlin Wall had fallen and the national republics of the USSR were beginning to clamor for a greater degree of independence. Glasnost permitted the publication of many of the previously repressed histories. Non-Russians were at last permitted to read uncensored accounts of how they lived before being subjugated by Russian and Soviet power. Ethnic and nationalist symbols of pride were rediscovered.¹¹ Freedom was in the air, and its scent invigorated these formerly repressed peoples and ethnic groups.

Then came the events of August, 1991 and the attempted coup to hold the USSR together by force. Basayev was in Moscow, and armed with a couple of hand grenades, went to help defend Yeltsin in the Russian Parliament.¹² The ripples from the failed coup attempt were felt in distant Chechnya, where local communist leaders had initially supported the coup plotters. Using this as a pretext to demonstrate, Chechen nationalist leaders began to consolidate power and prepared for local presidential and parliamentary elections. On 2 November 1991, newly-elected President Dudaev proclaimed Chechen independence. In response, President Yeltsin announced a state of emergency for Chechnya, dispatching troops to arrest the renegade general, Dudaev. The Chechens mobilized some 60,000 volunteers to defend against a probable Russian invasion.

Knowing that the Chechens would never be able to defend against a full-scale Russian invasion, Basayev began to look for some other means of leverage. Expecting a swift Russian response to Chechen claims of independence, Basayev and a handful of accomplices hijacked a passenger plane in the nearby town of Mineralnye Vody, demanding that the Russians lift the state of emergency or the plane would be blown up.¹³ The invasion was halted when the Russian parliament failed to ratify the decision to invade. It is doubtful whether Basayev's actions were instrumental in forcing the Russians to capitulate. One thing, however, was clear: Shamil Basayev was prepared to use any ploy to protect Chechen independence.

For the next 2 « years, Basayev gained considerable combat experience. Wherever fighting occurred within the Caucasus, Basayev was there. Fighting alongside the Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh or conducting combat operations against the Georgians in Abkhazia, Shamil Basayev became more and more adept at the use of force. In addition to this combat experience, he traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan for guerrilla training from the Mujahadin. While fighting in Abkhazia, Russian military specialists (who were secretly assisting the Abkhaz separatists) shared their knowledge with Basayev.¹⁴ This experience would not go to waste.

By the time Basayev returned to Chechnya in February 1994, he had created an elite unit of Chechen fighters who were intensely loyal to him. His "Abkhaz battalion" had gained the reputation of a disciplined, well-armed, fierce fighting force. He had no problem attracting volunteers. Unlike many of the other clan chieftains, Basayev was driven more by the cause of Chechen freedom than the desire for personal gain or political power.¹⁵ Though he personally disliked President Dudyayev, as long as Dudyayev continued to demand Chechen independence, Basayev would fight for him. He was also intensely loyal to his followers and went out of his way to protect them.

The summer of 1994 was one of growing tension within Chechnya. The Russian government accused Dudayev of creating a criminal state and, employing a variety of ruses, urged the Chechen people to topple him. In August 1994, heavily-armed opposition forces, with Russian support, attempted to overthrow Dudayev. Again, Basayev came to the aid of the pro-independence Dudayev. The fighting continued throughout the autumn between Chechen forces loyal to Dudaev and the Russian-backed opposition. Basayev's forces were responsible for defeating the chief opposition group.¹⁶ When it was apparent that their Chechen proxies were unable to defeat Dudayev, the Russian "power" ministers convinced President Yeltsin to deploy regular Russian forces into Chechnya.¹⁷ On 11 December 1994, the Russians marched into Chechnya. Basayev and the Chechen fighters were ready to meet them.

To date, there has been no complete and accurate accounting of Basayev's military exploits against the Russian forces. There is no questioning, however, that from the date when Russian forces moved into Chechnya until their humiliating withdrawal 21 months later, Basayev played a key role. He quickly gained the reputation as the most prominent field commander of the Chechen resistance. The Russians apparently even tried to bribe Basayev to give up the fight, in exchange for safety for himself and his family.¹⁸ He refused their offers. As noted earlier, Basayev's most famous exploit occurred in June 1995, when together with a company of Chechen fighters, he struck deep in the enemy's rear, holding the Russian city of Budennovsk as hostage. This operation merits a detailed analysis.

Budennovsk

By June 1995, the fighting in Chechnya had been raging for over 6 months. Disregarding military and civilian casualties, the Russian forces were finally gaining the upper hand. Moving from the north and east, Russian forces effectively destroyed and captured the capital of Grozny and were pushing the rebels to the south. Encountering stiff Chechen resistance, Russian tactics were beginning to resemble those expressed by an American officer in Vietnam: "In order to save the village, we had to destroy it".

By early June the situation for the Chechens was becoming desperate. A number of Russian military leaders were proclaiming that the war was nearly over.¹⁹ The last stronghold of Chechen opposition, the village of Shatoy, was almost under Russian control. Where some might have been tempted to capitulate to the superior Russian military force, the Chechen leader Dudayev remarked, "the struggle is not over, it assumes new forms."²⁰ One of those new forms was Shamil Basayev's daring raid into the city of Budennovsk.

During the course of the conflict, Chechen leaders had threatened to "take their war on to Russian territory".²¹ Despite these warnings, the perimeter surrounding Chechen territory remained porous.²² Russians who were guarding key junctions could often be bribed. With Chechen fighters in a near checkmate situation, Shamil Basayev developed a risky plan to force the Russians to halt combat operations. Concealed in two trucks supposedly filled with coffins containing the remains of dead Russian soldiers, and escorted by a "crudely painted" dummy police vehicle, Basayev and about 150 handpicked fighters would enter Russian territory and seize a large number of hostages. Basayev claims that his intent was to reach Moscow, and unleash something of the terror the residents of Chechnya had been exposed to for the past six

months. He hoped to convince Russian leaders to stop combat operations in Chechnya, and force them to the negotiating table.²³

The timing of the operation could not have been more advantageous for the Chechen side. Just as Basayev and his men were secretly leaving Chechnya and heading north, President Yeltsin was finalizing his remarks for the upcoming G-7 Summit, in Halifax, Canada. The Russian government was hoping to solicit greater foreign investment and additional economic aid from the G-7 countries. The recent increase in the Russian military tempo was planned to allow President Yeltsin to announce that the war in Chechnya was over. This conflict was an embarrassment to both the Russian government and to those foreign leaders who supported Yeltsin. Everyone's approval ratings would improve if the Russian president could announce that the bloodshed had stopped. The raid into Budennovsk would illustrate that the Chechen conflict was far from over, and that Russia remained a serious credit risk.

Shamil Basayev and his men crossed the border from Chechnya into the Stavropol District on Wednesday, June 14th. Everything was going according to plan until the convoy had just passed the outskirts of Budennovsk (a city of about 100,000, 120 km north of the Chechen border). After a routine stop, the local police unwittingly escorted the Chechen convoy back to the militia headquarters in downtown Budennovsk. Upon arrival, the Chechens stormed out of the trucks, killed a number of police and occupied the militia headquarters. The decision to move to the hospital was apparently made after a number of the Chechen rebels were wounded.²⁴ Basayev would not abandon his men. Reaching the hospital, they sealed the exits. There were



Figure 2 - Return route of Chechen fighters.

approximately 1,500 patients, family members and medical staff located within the hospital, guarded by some 150 heavily-armed Chechens. This was the beginning of an 8-day ordeal of terror, anxiety and surreal negotiations.

The local authorities realized that they were unable to flush the Chechens out of the hospital and requested assistance. Soon, regular army forces and internal troops (MVD) rushed to the scene and set up a perimeter.²⁵ Having secured their hostages, the Chechens now stated their conditions: cessation of combat in Chechnya, withdrawal of Russian troops and entry into negotiations with Chechen leader, Dzhokhar Dudayev. At this point of the crisis, the Russian authorities wouldn't even consider negotiating with the Chechen terrorists, and developed plans to storm the hospital.

The tense wait continued. The Russians continued to deploy a variety of special forces units to Budennovsk.²⁶ More than once, Basayev warned that he would kill hostages if the Russians attempted to storm the hospital. He positioned hostages along the windows to discourage the Russians from shooting.²⁷ Both Thursday and Friday (15 and 16 June), Basayev repeated the Chechen demands and warned the Russians not to attack. Alongside the Russian military units, the Russian media flooded to Budennovsk, and soon the entire country was following the dramatic events.

On 16 June, President Yeltsin arrived in Halifax, "smiling and waving hands to a welcoming crowd of young Canadian high school students."²⁸ The situation was not so peaceful back in Russia. That evening (16 June), members of the Russian Duma were already discussing a vote of "no confidence" in the current government and perhaps impeachment proceedings against the president.²⁹ The small group of Chechen fighters was beginning to shake the very foundation of the Russian government.³⁰ The Minister of Defense continued to insist that there would be no negotiations with the terrorists and that a "special operation" was being developed.³¹

"Saturday, June 17th will go down in the annals of the struggle against terrorism as a day of folly, unprofessionalism of the military and the complete idiocy of their superiors. These are the most delicate expressions which we happened to hear there."³² On two occasions, at dawn and at 2 p.m., the Russian special forces attempted to storm the hospital. The results were gruesome. Over a hundred of the hostages were killed, whether by Russian gunfire or by the Chechens is unclear. There were also a handful of casualties among the Chechen and Russian soldiers. In between the two attacks, perhaps to illustrate that they were not totally ruthless, Basayev released some 150 pregnant women and children. The standoff continued, and with the failed rescue attempt, Russian leaders quickly denied that they had given any order to attack.³³

It wasn't until day five of the crisis (18 June) that the Russians began to seriously consider the prospects of negotiating with the Chechens. In one of the most surreal events of modern media, the Russian Prime Minister began to conduct telephone negotiations with Basayev on live Russian TV. Millions of Russians watched as Victor Chernomyrdin pled with the Chechen leader not to harm the hostages.³⁴ The Prime Minister finally agreed to the Chechen demands of halting combat and beginning peace negotiations.³⁵

Basayev now faced a dilemma: how to return to Chechnya when completely surrounded by the humiliated Russian security establishment, who considered him guilty of countless murders and other crimes? He was not about to take the Prime Minister at his word, since it was apparent that the PM did not control the "power" ministers. Negotiations continued throughout Sunday and Monday (19 and 20 June). To insure safe passage, Basayev demanded that a number of "volunteer" hostages (mostly journalists and a number of Duma deputies) accompany the Chechens back to Chechnya.



Figure 3 - Storming the hospital.

It took some time for the Russians to assemble the six buses and a refrigerated truck (to carry the bodies of the dead Chechen rebels). The convoy left Budennovsk on Monday morning (20 June), but was forced to stop at the Chechen-Dagestani border when the Russian military commander refused to issue a written guarantee of the convoy's safe passage through Russian-held territory in Chechnya.³⁶ All the while, the convoy was surrounded by a perimeter of armed Russian personnel. After receiving a guarantee from the Prime Minister, the convoy entered into Chechnya, heading toward the mountain village of Zandak. After reaching the village, the hostages were released, and Basayev and the Chechens began to celebrate.³⁷



Figure 4 - Hostages being released.

The fallout from this incident was felt throughout all of Russia and much of the world. A week later, President Yeltsin remarked: "The Russians and the whole world saw the low capability of our special services to fulfill the tasks entrusted to them".³⁸ The following day, he accepted the resignations of two of his "power" ministers and two regional leaders.³⁹ The Russians did begin negotiations with the Chechens, but the talks soon broke down. From June 1995 until August 1996 there were a number of unsuccessful attempts to end the conflict either by force or through negotiations. The essence of the problem dealt with a fundamental contradiction between the Russian and Chechen positions: the Chechens wanted independence, while the Russians demanded that Chechnya remain a part of Russia. In August of this year, Chechen forces, again led by Shamil Basayev, conducted a successful three-pronged attack and regained possession of the capitol, Grozny.⁴⁰ Russian forces retaliated by threatening to bombard the city again. The Russian onslaught was cancelled when the new Secretary of the Security Council, Alexander Lebed, intervened and signed a cease-fire agreement.

Though the fighting has stopped, the question of Chechnya's final political status has not been solved. The cease-fire accords merely postpone this decision for five years. The Chechens claim they are now free, while Kremlin authorities continue to insist that Chechnya is a part of Russia. The last of the Russian military units are redeploying out of Chechnya. For the time being at least, the Chechens, under the courageous leadership of Shamil Basayev (who is now running for the post of Chechen president), have won their independence.

Shamil vs the US military?

Gazing into the murky crystal ball of emerging threats, Basayev is a likely example of the leader who defines the future security environment. How should the US military prepare to defend against such a threat? To date, the military has adopted mainly a defensive approach toward dealing with the terrorist threat, with an emphasis upon force protection.⁴¹ The failed attempt to seize General Aideed confirmed the prevalent notion that the military doesn't "do counterterrorism". In both Haiti and Bosnia, the US military has gone to great lengths to protect

its forces, while avoiding the arrest of individual war criminals. The military appears to insist upon maintaining the notional divide between military and criminal operations.

At the core of this belief is the tenet that militaries fight other militaries. Using the analogy of a football game, the uniformed players only compete against an opposing team. Soldiers fight other soldiers. Until the beginning of the 20th Century, the game of war was pretty well confined to the playing field. Even with the advent of modern weaponry, the belief has persisted that to win the game one team had to defeat the other side. To win the war meant defeating your opponent's military.

As we move into the 21st Century, the structure of the game appears to be changing. With a weakening of the nation-state, Clausewitz's dictum that war is an extension of [state] politics may no longer be valid. Alongside the deterioration of the state, the opposing team's military has broken up, and some of these players have moved up into the stands, wreaking all sorts of havoc. While the US military must still prepare to defend against the traditional opposing team of a state-sponsored military, it is increasingly called upon to help settle fights in the stands. The military complains (rightly so) that this is a police function, and that it is not configured to handle these disputes. The military warns that such missions detract from its ability to handle an opposing team (or two of them nearly simultaneously). Thus, the military finds itself in a dilemma. It cannot remain on the playing field, waiting for an opposing team to appear, while chaos reigns in the stands.

Desert Storm notwithstanding, the military will probably find itself playing a greater and greater police role into the next century. Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Chechnya all indicate that future conflict will be both unconventional and requiring imposition of order over defeat of a specific state-sponsored military. The military must begin to reconfigure itself to handle these threats. Instead of an opposing team with set plays, familiar equipment and a common set of rules, the military must develop the necessary doctrinal concepts to handle a wider variety of villains and challenges. In developing this doctrine, planners ought to consider the Russian experience against fighters like Shamil Basayev in Chechnya.

First, it must realize that this type of opponent cares nothing for the formal rules of war and is prepared to use any stratagem to further his objective. The notion that the battlefield is isolated and that fighting is restricted to those who wear uniforms is absurd to this enemy's way of thinking. Everything and everyone is fair game. A precision missile attack on an enemy city could result in the destruction of a friendly school or hospital.⁴² This type of enemy will search for any weakness, and then exploit it fully. The criminal mind cares little for the laws of war.

Secondly, confronting such a threat, the US military must do everything to isolate and confine the enemy leader's freedom of movement. The incident at Budennovsk might have been prevented with a secure border around Chechnya. These unconventional leaders must be monitored, and when necessary, targeted. Direct, personal force is the only argument which the dedicated, committed leader understands. Thirdly, besides developing super-efficient SWAT teams, the US military needs to place greater emphasis on the development of non-lethal weapon systems which could be used during a large hostage-taking incident (e.g. a gas to render the rebel leaders unconscious).

Fourthly, restricting media access is crucial in limiting the relative strength of this type of threat. Televising the live hostage negotiations with the Russian prime minister inadvertently placed Basayev on an equal footing and significantly strengthened the Chechen cause. The rebel leader draws much of his legitimacy and popularity from such spectacles. The media must be enlisted to discredit these leaders, or at least ignore their demands for publicity. To the extent that the media will not cooperate, they will lend support to the opposition forces. Finally, the US must be wary with whom it shares its military skills and secrets. Basayev well illustrates the problems that can develop when legitimate governments elect to provide military training and equipment to dubious allies. Today's freedom fighter might be transformed into tomorrow's terrorist.

Conclusion

In one of the more intriguing books on the subject of modern war, Martin van Creveld asks the question "by whom will war be fought in the future?" If the nation-state does collapse, there will no longer exist a state-sponsored army to defend the government. He's not exactly sure what will replace the state and its defenders, but one of his suggestions describes the process which is observed in Chechnya:

It is worth pointing out that tribal societies, which do not have the state, also do not recognize the distinction between army and people. Such societies do not have armies; it would be more accurate to say that they themselves *are* armies.... Nor, in their case, would it be correct to speak of soldiers. What they have is warriors, with the result that there are many languages where the term for "warrior" simply means "young man". [Such societies] may point to the future.⁴³

Suppose for a moment that the above hypothesis is true. The collapse of the nation-state will have a profound effect on what we currently regard as the "correlation of forces". The strength of any given armed formation will be measured not so much in the number of divisions, squadrons or fleets, but in the resolve of the individual warrior leader. With the continuing fascination with high-tech weaponry, this factor tends to be underestimated. As they develop the doctrine and restructure the forces to meet the emerging threats of the 21st Century, US military leaders ought to consider the role which a single committed leader played in the Chechen conflict.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Holzer, "Krulak Warns of Over-Reliance on Technology," *Defense News*, 7-13 Oct 96, pp. 4, 32. [BACK](#)

² Lee Hockstader, "Jubilant Chechens Ready to Celebrate," *Washington Post*, 4 Sep 96, p. A17. [BACK](#)

³ James Minahan, *Nations Without States* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996), 121. [BACK](#)

⁴ Robert F. Baumann, "Historical Perspective on the Conflict in Chechnia," *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement*, Vol 4, No. 1 (Summer 1995), p. 129. [BACK](#)

⁵. The Russian defense establishment is in the midst of reform and accurate strength figures are difficult to find. The Regular Army forces are numbered at about 1.5 million, but "according to the calculations of independent military experts, about 5 million people serving in over 20 different ministries and departments are now in uniform in Russia". See: Sergey Ovsyienko, "Will Soldiers be Found for Russian Army," *Rossiyskiye vesti*, 5 Oct 95 as translated in FBIS-UMA-95-211-S, 1 Nov 95. The bulk of forces deployed into Chechnya came from regular army forces (MOD) and from the Internal Ministry (MVD). [BACK](#)

⁶. The intent of this study is not to romanticize the martial exploits of Shamil Basayev. The methods he has employed are cruel and vicious, and have often been in violation of recognized laws of warfare. At the same time, however, care must be taken to avoid demonizing him. His actions, when cast in the light of Chechen independence, are courageous and praiseworthy. [BACK](#)

⁷. As Russia was expanding into the Northern Caucasus in the 1800's it ran into a significant stumbling block: the Islamic warrior-priest, Imam Shamil (1797-1871). For nearly a quarter of a century, this warrior led the Chechens in a guerrilla struggle against the Russian military. Ann Sheehy, "Power Struggle in Checheno-Ingushetia," *Report on the USSR*, RFE/RL Research Institute, 15 Nov 1991, p. 20. For an excellent biography of the original Shamil, see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Dagestan* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1994). [BACK](#)

⁸. When asked if he considered himself to be similar to the original Shamil, Basayev answered: "I honor his memory," and that even though the Russians "won over us 137 years ago [1858], it has never broken us down". See: "Interview with Chechen Colonel Shamil Basayev," *Lidove noviny*, 18 July 95, pp.1,7, as translated in FBIS-SOV-95-139, 18 Jul 95. [BACK](#)

⁹. Oleg Blotskiy, "Terroristy pronikayut v Rossiyu za den'gi," [Terrorists are penetrating into Russia for money], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 12 Mar 96, p. 3. [BACK](#)

¹⁰. For about four years he worked at the Aksaisky' state farm in the Volgograd region, and in 1987, he entered the Moscow Institute of Land Exploitation Engineering. There is some question regarding the completion of this course. According to one account, Basayev was expelled from this institute for poor academic progress. Basayev claims that it was his Chechen background which prohibited him from being accepted into law school. There may be some truth to this contention. Russian discrimination toward peoples from the Caucasus has been well documented. See: "Shamil Basayev-the Lone Wolf," *Moscow News*, No. 24-24, 30 Jun-6 July 1995, p. 4. [BACK](#)

¹¹. For example, General Djokar Dudaev, then a Soviet Air Force officer serving in the Baltics, allowed local nationalists to fly the Estonian flag on his base. See: Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994), 183-4. [BACK](#)

¹². One of those strange coincidences of history! Here on the streets of Moscow, Basayev was assisting two airborne generals by the name of Grachev and Lebed protect the recently elected Russian President, Boris Yeltsin. Four years later, the roles and political loyalties of these four actors would be markedly different. Yeltsin no longer stood for democracy among a wide slice of

the Russian populace; Grachev had been removed as Defense Minister due to his inability to handle the Chechen problem; and the "kingmaker" Lebed would sign a peace agreement with the Chechens which effectively gave them their independence. See: "Interview with Chechen Colonel Shamil Basayev," *Lidove noviny* in Czech, 18 July 1995, pp 1,7 as translated in FBIS-SOV-95-139, 18 July 1995. [BACK](#)

¹³.The plane was forced to fly to Turkey, where the hijackers demanded a press conference. The Turkish authorities, however, denied their request and the plane was sent back to Chechnya. None of the passengers were harmed. See: Artem Vetrov, "Shamil Basayev--Rational Terrorist," *Segodnya*, 21 Jun 95, p. 3 as translated in FBIS-SOV-95-123, 21 Jun 95. For a Russian version of this episode, see: Yu. V. Nikolaev, *The Chechen Tragedy* (New York: Nova Science Publ., 1996), 63. [BACK](#)

¹⁴.Stanislav Lunev, "Chechen Terrorists--Made in the USSR," *Jamestown Prism*, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, 26 Jan 96, p. 1. See quote from Vetrov: "As a result, Shamil Basayev had, by October 1993, following almost 18 months of continuous fighting and combat training, become one of the most prominent and experienced of Dudayev's commanders". [BACK](#)

¹⁵.Again, I want to avoid "sanctifying" Basayev. No doubt, he is driven by not wholly altruistic motives, but in contrast to many of the other Chechen leaders, he apparently placed Chechen independence in front of personal gain. Alongside of his bravery and sacrifice, Basayev has reportedly reaped some of the spoils of war. [BACK](#)

¹⁶.Vetrov.[BACK](#)

¹⁷.Loosely defined, the "power" ministers within the Russian security establishment are those leaders which presumably have armed forces at their disposal, and usually indicate: the Minister of Defense (MOD), the Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Secretary of the Security Council; the Chief of the Federal Security Service (FSB; formerly KGB), the Director of the Federal Border Service (FSG) and the chief of the Presidential Security Force. There remains some doubt as to which ministers were responsible for convincing Yeltsin that the Chechen crisis could be best handled in a forceful, military manner. Likely candidates include the MOD (Grachev), MVD (Yerin), FSB (Stepashin), Yeltsin's chief bodyguard and chief of the presidential security force (Korzhakov), and the Secretary of the Security Council (Lobov). [BACK](#)

¹⁸.Francisco Herranz, "We Should Spit on the Entire World for Tolerating this Injustice," *El Mundo*, 2 Mar 96, as translated in FBIS-SOV-96-044, 2 Mar 96.[BACK](#)

¹⁹.Since first entering into Chechnya in December, 1994, there has been no shortage of official announcements as to how quickly the conflict would be over. One week after the destruction of Samashki (April 1995), the commander of the Unified Group of Federal Forces in Chechnya, A. Kulikov reported that "the stage of active combat operations in Chechnya is over." See, Kulikov, "News Conference," Moscow Russian Public Television First Channel, 1400 GMT 19 Apr 95, as translated in FBIS-SOV-95-076, 19 Apr 1995. [BACK](#)

²⁰Nikolay Zagnyko, *ITAR-TASS* Report, 1148 GMT, 14 June 95 as reported in FBIS-SOV-95-114, 14 June 1995.[BACK](#)

²¹There is some question regarding the Chechen delay in committing subversive attacks on Russian territory. This issue may be related to the seeming inability of the Russian authorities to either capture or kill the Chechen leadership, even though these same leaders were rarely reluctant to grant public interviews. The answer might be found in a secret agreement between Chechen and Russian officials, which stated that the Russians would not target Chechen leaders in exchange for Chechen assurances that they would confine their operations to Chechnya. See: S.I., "Was There a Secret Deal With FSB," *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, 20 June 95, p. 1, as translated in RUSPRESS, 20 June 95. For specific quote of Dудаев, see: Alekseyevna, "We Are All the Regime's Hostages."[BACK](#)

²²Consider the comments of a journalist who is familiar with this territory: "How was it possible for a large band like that to sneak so far into enemy territory? For anyone with local savvy the question is plain silly. What was there to stop them? Sure there are checkpoints straddling asphalt roads, but these are for the stupid, the law-abiding and the wealthy who do not mind being fleeced by the road patrols. For the rest there is the Mother Steppe with its myriad dirt tracks among the sand dunes. See: Sergei Roy, "Chechnya and Russia Before and After Budyonnovsk," *Moscow News*, No. 26, 7-13 July 1995, p. 5. [BACK](#)

²³The details of the operation depend widely on the source. Russian sources tend to exaggerate the size of Basayev's force, while Chechen claims are usually understated. Basayev has given numerous interviews describing the Budennovsk raid from his perspective. For example, see: FBIS-SOV-95-116, FBIS-SOV-95-139, FBIS-SOV-95-142, FBIS-SOV-96-062-S, FBIS-SOV-96-044, FBIS-SOV-96-095-S.[BACK](#)

²⁴ Nikolay Gritchin, "Banditam net proshcheniia" [No forgiveness for the bandits], *Izvestiia*, 17 June 95, p. 1. There is some question as to whether or not Budennovsk was the original objective of Basayev. According to some reports, Basayev had planned to make it all the way to the Kremlin. See: Vetrov.[BACK](#)

²⁵Lyudmila Leontyeva, "Budyonnovsk: Striking at Rears," *Moscow News*, 23-29 June 1995, pp. 1-2.[BACK](#)

²⁶Besides the local militia and army forces from the helicopter garrison in Budennovsk, units from the "Vega" and "Alpha" special forces, 1,000 soldiers of the Internal Forces (MVD), and approximately a hundred members of the presidential guard force took part in the operation.[BACK](#)

²⁷While local authorities heeded these threats, the federal forces continued preparing their attack plans. See: Nikolay Astashkin, "Gorod blokirovany dvoini'm koltz'om" [The City is Sealed Off by a Double Ring], *Krasnaya zvezda*, 16 June 95, p. 1.[BACK](#)

²⁸Zhou Xisheng, "Russia Still Wavering on G-7 Threshold", *Beijing Xinhua*, 16 June 95 as reported in FBIS-CHI-95-117, 16 June 95.[BACK](#)

²⁹. "State Duma Considers Events in Budennovsk", INTERFAX, 1849 GMT 16 June 95, as reported in FBIS-SOV-95-117. [BACK](#)

³⁰. Consider the following quote from Svetlana Alekseyeva, "We Are All the Regime's Hostages," *Sovetskaya Rossiia*, 20 June 95, p. 1, as translated in FBIS-SOV-95-110, 20 June 95. "But in actual fact, throughout these days the country [Russia] has been led by...Shamil Basayev." [BACK](#)

³¹. Leontyeva. [BACK](#)

³². Leontyeva. [BACK](#)

³³. Otto Latsis, "Zhestokost' porozhdaet tol'ko zhestokost'" [Brutality breeds nothing but brutality], *Izvestiia*, 20 Jun 95, pp. 1-2. To quote from the above article: "Everyone is asking who gave the order for this crazy assault--but no one knows." [BACK](#)

³⁴. Reading the text of their conversation does not capture the awful absurdity of what the television viewer was exposed to. Here was the prime minister from one of the most powerful countries on the earth, pleading with a "dirty, bearded, Chechen terrorist." For example: (Chernomydin speaking) "Is this enough? Now release women and children...Listen... Listen, I beg you..I beg you: Release women, children, sick and wounded now...Release them now...I beg you...Don't do that again...No more...I beg you". From Sergey Parkomenko, "Belyi dom: eshe voskreceny'e" [The White House: just another Sunday], *Segodnya*, 20 June 95, p. 3. [BACK](#)

³⁵. These were the same Chechens which the Prime Minister had earlier referred to as "gangsters, unworthy of negotiations with the highest leadership of the country." See: Stepan Kiselev, "Hostages of the Kremlin. The Tragic Events in Budennovsk are Changing the Political Landscape of Russia," *Moskovskiye novosti*, 18-25 June 95, p. 5, as translated in FBIS-SOV-95-141-S, 24 July 1995. [BACK](#)

³⁶. "Kulikov Refuses Safe Passage," ITAR-TASS, 1156 GMT, 20 June 95, as reported in FBIS-SOV-95-119, 20 June 95. [BACK](#)

³⁷. This incident reflected the true nature of the earlier announced Russian victory in Chechnya. Even though the Russians had been notified of the convoy's destination, they were apparently unable to move forces into this Chechen-controlled territory. See, Valeriy Yakov, "Mir v Chechne nuzhen narodu a ne terroristam" [People, not terrorists, need peace in Chechnya], *Izvestiia*, 28 June 95, p. 1. [BACK](#)

³⁸. Andrey Shtorkh, "Yeltsin Admits Making Concessions," ITAR-TASS, 0859 GMT, 29 Jun 95, as reported in FBIS-SOV-95-125, 29 Jun 95. [BACK](#)

³⁹. "Yeltsin Accepts Resignation of Four Officials," ITAR-TASS, 30 Jun 95, as reported in FBIS-SOV-95-127, 30 Jun 95. The four relieved were Interior Minister (MVD) Yerin, Federal Security Chairman (formerly KGB) Stepashin, Vice Premier N. Yegorov and head of Stavropol regional administration, Y. Kuznetsov. [BACK](#)

⁴⁰ Michael Specter, "Chechen Rebel Leader Savors Triumph in a Shattered City," *New York Times*, 16 Aug 96, pp. 1, 3.[BACK](#)

⁴¹ According to the latest edition of *FM 100-5 Operations*, responsibility for combatting terrorism lies with the Department of State (overseas) or the Department of Justice (domestic). DoD will support these activities. *Field Manual 100-5*, Washington DC, June 93, pp. 13-6, 13-7. Given the likely synthesis of war, crime and terrorist acts in future conflicts, perhaps it's time to relook the responsibilities for fighting terrorism.[BACK](#)

⁴² Realizing that they are unable to compete with the high-tech US military prowess, low tech opponents will likely resort to terrorism or other sinister actions. For a sobering argument why our high-tech weaponry might not suffice against such an opponent, see Richard Betts, "The Downsize of the Cutting Edge," *National Interest*, Fall 96, pp. 76-83. For a look at the characteristics of this threat, see: Ralph Peters, "The New Warrior Class", *Parameters*, Summer 1994, pp. 16-26. In one of the more interesting interviews conducted by Shamil Basayev, he spoke how developments in modern warfare have "hugely improved his chances where succeeding generations of freedom fighters have failed". Advances in technology have transformed the traditional correlation of forces. Today, a small, committed group, armed with weapons of mass destruction (WMD), could conceivably defeat a modern state. See: Victoria Clark, "Chechens Prefer Total War to Bad Peace," *The Observer* (London), 13 Aug 95, p. 20.[BACK](#)

⁴³ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pp. 56-7.[BACK](#)